



Obesity in Islām

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He impressed the gym-experts with details on how to ensure a balanced diet. He dumbfounded the world by predicting the war in Iraq and Syria. Despite the passing of nearly one and a half millenniums, not a single systematic enterprise has managed to catch up to the in-depth knowledge found in the teachings of the Prophet of Islām ﷺ.

Among the countless aḥādīth pertaining to the foretelling of the future are those to which our minds do not usually go. One such ḥadīth notifies us of the worrying state humankind in the future will employ: obesity. The Prophet ﷺ has said:

« إن بعدكم قوما يخونون ولا يؤتمنون ، ويشهدون ولا يستشهدون ، وينذرون ولا يفون ، ويظهر فيهم السمن » .

“Indeed, after you (will come) a people who betray and cannot be trusted, give testimony without being told to and make vows and not fulfil them; among them will appear obesity.”⁽¹⁾

No intelligent person can read the latter statement of this ḥadīth – where the reference of obesity becoming rampant is very clear – and conclude that it’s a ‘lucky chance’. The laws of probability also negate such a pitiable claim of coincidence. This is yet another miraculous prophecy of the Final Messenger of Allāh ﷺ.

Looking at the context of the ḥadīth, obesity has been mentioned with quite a negative background. The ‘Ulamā’ have differentiated between natural build and deliberate gluttony in this regard: the former being innocent while the latter is condemnable. This interpretation is necessary due to many other narrations explicitly stating such people will love obesity⁽²⁾.

Excessive eating (gluttony) is prohibited in the Holy Qur’ān, where Allāh ﷻ says:

﴿يَبْنَىٰٓ ءَادَمَ خُذُوْا زِيْنَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوْا وَشَرِبُوْا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوْا اِنَّهٗ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِيْنَ ۝ۛ﴾



“O children of Ādam, take on your adornment at every masjid. Eat and drink; and do not be extravagant. Surely, He (Allāh) does not like the extravagant.”⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ Al-Bukhārī (2651) and Muslim (2535).

⁽²⁾ Muslim (2534) and At-Tirmidhī (2221).

⁽³⁾ [Al-A‘rāf: 7/31].

This is the most clear-cut āyah in the Qur’ān which encourages a balanced diet. Recognising reality, the Sharī’ah acknowledges the fact that eating and drinking are essential human needs; therefore, we are encouraged to enjoy our foods and beverages. As is the norm with every concept of lifestyle, a balance is crucial. Food intake is no exception.

Recent studies conducted by NHS Borders Dentists have shown that a standard Twix bar contains ten teaspoons (49.2g) of sugar⁽⁴⁾! Coca-Cola contains seven teaspoons (35g) of sugar per can⁽⁵⁾; statistically speaking, 1.7 billion servings of the drink are being sold worldwide by the company on a daily basis⁽⁶⁾! Let us not forget the ḥadīth where a man burped near the Prophet ﷺ, to which the Prophet ﷺ replied:

« كف عنا جشاءك ، فإن أكثرهم شبعاً في الدنيا أطولهم جوعاً يوم القيامة » .

“Keep your burp away from us; for, indeed, those who were the most full-up in the world will encounter the longest of hunger on the Day of Qiyāmah.”⁽⁷⁾

The Prophet ﷺ has very explicitly prophesised such a lifestyle will occur in the future times. In the first ḥadīth of this article, common traits of a mainstream community of the future are described:

- Betrayal: i.e. the people will be very disloyal in their social dealings. An individual might trust another with a valuable item or secret, fully depending on him with confidence. The latter person, however, will take such a trust to his own advantage.
- Giving witness to something when not asked to do so: there can be many scenarios to this. Without listing all possible interpretations, the ones manifest today can easily be noted. In a nutshell, this ḥadīth can refer to doing things in the wrong order, fabricating lies and even ‘snitching’ (in some situations).
- False promises: talking more and doing less – this requires no elaboration.

These qualities are, no doubt, prevalent today. May Allāh ﷻ protect us from such traits, and enable us to inculcate praiseworthy personas within our hearts and lives. In any case, the Prophet ﷺ has promised that obesity will be loved by those adopting such negative traits. Other narrations mention this explicitly, for example:

⁽⁴⁾ http://www.nhsbordersdentists.scot.nhs.uk/document_library/sugar_list.pdf accessed on 14th February 2015.

⁽⁵⁾ http://www.nhsbordersdentists.scot.nhs.uk/document_library/sugar_list.pdf accessed on 14th February 2015.

⁽⁶⁾ <http://www.coca-cola.co.uk/faq/products/how-many-cans-of-coca-cola-are-sold-worldwide-in-a-day.html> accessed on 14th February 2015.

⁽⁷⁾ At-Tirmidhī (2478).

« ثم يخلف قوم يحبون السمنة » .

“Then such people will follow who love obesity.”⁽⁸⁾

« ثم يأتي من بعدهم قوم يتسمنون ويحبون السمن » .

“Then, after them, will come people who will be obese and love obesity.”⁽⁹⁾

This quality of ‘loving’ obesity is already widespread. A new survey has shown that only 6% of obese people actually acknowledge their weight is severe enough to be classified as obese⁽¹⁰⁾. This means 94% deny the fact that their weight is a problem! This is quite a worrying statistic.

Among the many factors which might have caused the increase in obesity in the modern era, games consoles and other gadgets seem to be at the top end of the list. According to the National Obesity Forum, studies have shown a strong positive correlation between the usage of games consoles and obesity⁽¹¹⁾. The prevalence of cars, TV, computers and desk jobs has also been noted⁽¹²⁾.

Islām, on the other hand, provides alternatives to enjoyment: both natural and healthy. The Qur’ān informs us that Sayyidunā Ya’qūb ﷺ had permitted his children to go for a picnic and play together⁽¹³⁾. The Mother of the Believers, ‘Ā’ishah رضي الله عنها, has told her students that the Prophet ﷺ would go and race with her⁽¹⁴⁾. In fact, the books of ḥadīth have recorded quite an entertaining incident from which one can notice that the great companion, Salamah Ibn Al-Akwa’ رضي الله عنه, was faster than the red, Arabian camel⁽¹⁵⁾!

Bear in mind, Islām isn’t just theory; it’s practice too. We learn from many books of Ḥadīth the exact descriptions of the Prophet’s ﷺ body – things fitness advisers would definitely admire. His strong build and flawless physique have had chapters (and even books) dedicated to them!⁽¹⁶⁾

May Allāh ﷻ protect us all from the dangers of obesity and enable us to follow the Prophet’s ﷺ Sunnah in all aspects of our lives. Āmīn.

⁽⁸⁾ Muslim (2534).

⁽⁹⁾ At-Tirmidhī (2221).

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2012/01/11/denial-and-unhappy/> accessed on 14th February 2015.

⁽¹¹⁾ <http://www.nationalobesityforum.org.uk/component/content/article/1-nof-in-the-media/338-tv-video-games-and-child-obesity.html> accessed on 14th February 2015.

⁽¹²⁾ <http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/loseweight/pages/statistics-and-causes-of-the-obesity-epidemic-in-the-uk.aspx> accessed on 14th February 2015.

⁽¹³⁾ [Yūsuf: 12/12].

⁽¹⁴⁾ Abū Dāwūd (2578) and Ibn Mājah (1979).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Muslim (1754).

⁽¹⁶⁾ See *Ash-Shamā’il Al-Muḥammadiyyah* by Imām At-Tirmidhī رضي الله عنه. English translations are available.